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U.S. Education Department 'reconsidered' extensions for American Rescue Plan funds

By [Kathleen Moore](#), Staff Writer April 4, 2025

ALBANY — The federal government abruptly canceled funding for tutoring and counseling services for children throughout the country Friday, a move that will affect hundreds of students in the Capital Region.

It's been five years [since schools closed](#) nationwide to try to [stop the spread of the coronavirus](#). Locally, many schools stayed closed and moved to remote instruction for more than a year, leading to [massive losses in reading and math skills](#) at every age level. [Behavior problems](#) and [poor attendance](#) have plagued schools since they reopened.

Schools received [millions of dollars in American Rescue Plan](#) funds to help students recover educationally. Schools that did not spend it all at once were given extensions to use [the remaining \\$363 million this school year](#), with some projects funded through June 30 and others through March 2026, according to the state Education Department.

More than a dozen local schools poured their remaining money into tutoring and counseling for hundreds of students this year, administrators said.

But in a letter issued after business hours Friday, U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon said the department “reconsidered” the extensions and would be ending them that day.

She wrote that the extensions were granted “recently” — they were granted on Sept. 24, 2024 — so any impacts would be “minimal.”

“Moreover, an agency may reconsider its prior decision. So you could not rely on the Department adhering to its original decision,” she wrote.

But parents whose children have received tutoring this year, thanks to the extensions, said the impact will be huge.

“I’ve been praying for tutoring for so long, I just couldn’t afford it,” said Silvanis Guillermo, whose second-grader was receiving tutoring.

Her son was a toddler in March 2020. He caught COVID-19 and was hospitalized at Albany Medical Center for a month.

“He nearly died,” Guillermo said.

Afterward, as he and his mother struggled with long COVID, she kept him home. There were no treatments or vaccinations approved for young children, so he did not attend preschool. When he enrolled in kindergarten, he had missed two crucial years of language development. He struggled with reading in kindergarten and first grade. Then, at the start of second grade, his school used the federal funds from the American Rescue Plan to pay for tutoring.

Tutors from tutoring company Sylvan Learning came into the school to work with him and other children who had learning losses related to the pandemic. At the beginning of the year, he tested at reading at a level expected of students halfway through kindergarten. Now he is testing in reading as if he were one quarter of the way through second grade. He is reading books for the first time, his mother said.

If the tutors had another month with him, he likely would have been reading at grade level, said Audrey Waterfield, owner of the Glenville Sylvan center that provided tutors to his school.

The cost for each student: \$65 an hour for about 45 hours of tutoring, or less than \$3,000 each for a program that has nearly caught up the students who were being tutored.

The Trump administration says that the pandemic is over and thus it is [time to stop paying for recovery](#). But the impacts on education will last another decade, Waterfield said.

“Students who were just born when COVID hit, those kids started school without two years of language skills all other students naturally had,” she said. “All the kids who are in middle school are missing their second- and third-grade foundational writing. Everyone who’s currently in high school now, they weren’t in middle school when you’re supposed to learn to take your own notes, track your own assignments.”

At every age, those losses have made it harder for them to learn at grade level, she said.

“It’s a massive ship. It will not turn on a dime,” she said. “We are right in the middle of it. It’s going to continue for a decade or more to come.”

Cathlene Schwartzbeck, who owns the Sylvan franchises in Albany and Clifton Park and also provided tutors to schools, said her tutors were helping high schoolers with Regents exam prep until the U.S. Education Department's letter Friday.

The students she is working with have IEPs, which are specific plans for support to help special education students learn effectively. Those supports weren’t available when schools switched to online learning.

“They did not get the supports,” she said. “Think about math — all of those math skills build on each other and they’re missing a big hole.”

Some parents who saw progress with this year’s tutoring are now feeling despair.

“I had a mental breakdown. I was heartbroken,” said Siobhan Cronin-Jolicoeur, whose first-grader was receiving tutoring. “I see a tremendous change in him. Now to have it taken away.”

Guillermo added that as a single mom who couldn't afford tutoring, the funding answered her prayers.

"This is what I was praying for — and it just shattered," she said.

Her son doesn’t understand why the tutoring is over.

“I want it to stay,” her son told the Times Union. “Because they’re very nice. They help me a lot with reading and math.”

At his school, St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish School in Schenectady, the principal had to tell the students that not only would they never see their tutors again — but that one of the mental health counselors is leaving, too. That position was also covered by American Rescue Plan funds this year.

“That’s probably our biggest loss,” said Principal Denise O’Connor. “The loss to these children is huge.”

The counselor focused on teaching older children the social-emotional skills they should have learned while playing together in preschool. Many preschools and day cares were closed for years because there were no vaccines or treatments for young children, leaving them without normal interaction with peers.

“They lost social skills, they lost how to problem solve, how to do anger management, how to interact with others when they are upset. They missed the basics when they were little,” O’Connor said. “That’s much more difficult to learn as you get older.”

She is trying to figure out how to readjust the school budget — set a year ago — to pay for the final three months of the counselor’s contract.

Waterfield, of Sylvan, is also trying to come up with an affordable tutoring plan for families. But in the meantime, she had to lay off six teachers with the loss of the funding, she said.

New York state is also fighting for the funds. The state Education Department sent a letter to the U.S. Education Department on Tuesday, threatening to sue.

“While an agency may ‘reconsider’ a previous decision, it may not do so without any changes in facts or law,” wrote Counsel and Deputy Commissioner Daniel Morton-Bentley. “The only thing that has ‘changed’ is USDOE’s policy position ... USDOE cannot flip-flop based on political considerations along without providing any reasoned explanation.”

He urged McMahon to “honor your word” and pay the remaining funds through the end of the previously granted extensions.

“NYSED will be seeking legal redress for USDOE’s unilateral, unexplained reversal of its position,” he wrote.

However, school officials said a lawsuit would likely not resolve the issue in time to restore services this school year. The state Education Department advised them to stop services for now.

“Given the uncertainties, we would advise impacted parties to halt work and refrain from engaging in any significant new investments regarding this program,” the state wrote in a letter to schools.